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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: MARCH 20, 2009

Summary: Prime Minister Gilani's remarks, made during an interview with "The Wall Street Journal," dominated headlines on Friday. All major dailies quoted him as saying that "he would seek to tip the balance of power back toward the Parliament." In a Washington dateline story, the English daily, "Dawn," reported that U.S. Defense Secretary Gates expressed "concern" over the activities of the Taliban's 'Quetta Shoora' in Balochistan, but "disagreed" as well with the suggestion to use drones against them. Reporting the likely arrival of U.S. CIA chief to Pakistan on Friday, several major dailies noted that he would "hold talks with the top Pakistani officials." Newspapers highlighted reports that Ambassador Patterson met with Balochistan Governor and other security officials in Quetta and "discussed efforts being made to rescue kidnapped UNHCR official John Solecki."

Most major dailies ran scathing editorials on the likely drone attacks on Balochistan province as reported in the U.S. media recently. The center-right nationalist daily, "Nawa-i-Waqt," noted that "our elected rulers chose to remain subservient to America like their predecessor General Musharraf and thus encouraged America. That is why America now wants to widen the scope of drone attacks to Quetta and other areas of Balochistan." The centrist national daily, "The News," advised the Pakistan government to ensure that "U.S. is made aware of the risks and does not embark on a strategy that adds to the problems already being faced by Pakistan." The Pro Taliban Jihadi daily "Islam," warned that "if Pakistan does not resist this move at this moment, there is a possibility that the next target will be Karachi, as a propaganda drive has been unleashed there that Taliban leaders are present in Karachi too." End Summary.

News Stories

"PM Vows Powers Shift To parliament; Says He will Cooperate With Nawaz" "The Nation" (03/20)

"In an interview with The Wall Street Journal published on Thursday, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani has said he would seek to tip the balance of power back towards Parliament and away from President Asif Ali Zardari as he made an offer to the Pakistan Muslim League-N to rejoin the governing coalition."

"Gates Against Strikes In Balochistan 'Taliban 'Quetta Shoora' New U.S. Headache" "Dawn" (03/20)

"U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates has said that the United States

was concerned about the activities of the Quetta shoora in Balochistan but disagreed with the suggestion to use drones against them as well. At a regular briefing at the Pentagon, Mr. Gates also vowed to catch Osama bin Laden no matter how long it takes."

"CIA Chief Due Today" "The News" (03/20)

"CIA Chief Leon Panetta will arrive in Islamabad today (Friday) to hold talks with the Pakistani top officials about the war on terror, situation in Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and the Mumbai attacks, sources said."

"Pakistan Will Raise Issue With CIA Chief" "The Nation" (03/20)

"Perturbed over reports in a section of the U.S. media about the possible drone attacks on Balochistan, Pakistan's security circles will raise the issue today (Friday) with the new CIA Chief Leon Panetta when he arrives here on a two-day visit from India."

"JI Criticizes New U.S. Drone Attack Plan" "Dawn" (03/20)

"The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has expressed its concern over reports that the United States is planning to expand drone attacks to Balochistan. He said U.S. policies in the region disregarded people's sentiments as expressed in a resolution adopted by Parliament on October 22 last year."

"Efforts For Solecki's Release Discussed" "Dawn," "The Nation," "The News," "Pakistan Observer," "The Statesman" (03/20)

"U.S. Ambassador Anne Patterson met Governor Zulfiqar Ali Magsi and security officials at the Governor's House, Quetta on Thursday and discussed efforts being made to rescue kidnapped UNHCR official John Solecki. Patterson also held a meeting with FC Inspector-General Maj-Gen. Saleem Nawaz at the Headquarters of Frontier Corps. Informed sources said that Maj-Gen. Saleem Nawaz informed her about measures being taken by his force to check the movement of Taliban insurgents in areas along the Pakistan-Afghan border."

"Solecki Likely To Be Freed In 24 Hours" "The News" (03/20)

"The kidnapped official of United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), John Solecki, is expected to be released within next 24 hours, a private TV channel reported on Thursday."

"Troops Retaliate After Attack On Base; Six Killed" "Dawn" (03/20)

"Six people were killed and 26 others injured when security forces resorted to heavy fire and shelling after militants attacked an army base in Landi Kotal on Thursday evening."

"Power Pylons Blown Up In Peshawar" "Dawn" (03/20)

"Suspected militants blew up a transmission line, disrupting power supply to major parts of the Peshawar city early on Thursday morning."

"War On Terror Shifted To Pakistan: Report" "The News" (03/20)

"Observing that the 'war on terror' has now shifted to Pakistan, an American think-tank has said the United States now needs to make harder choices in dealing with Islamabad, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) said in its latest report."

"IDPs Jirga Demands Shariah" "The News" (03/20)

"A Jirga of the displaced families from Bajaur Agency Thursday said they would not leave the relief camps till the government enforced Sharai Nizam-e-Adl Regulation in the agency on the patterns of Swat."

The participants of the Jirga, held at the Katcha Garhi camp, Peshawar, rejected the announcement by Bajaur political agent that the IDPs could return to the agency and the administration would also hand them relief goods on their return to their respective hometowns."

"Taliban To Honor Ceasefire In Bajaur" "The News" (03/20)

"Leading Taliban commander in Bajaur Agency and deputy head of the

banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan Maulvi Faqir Muhammad has said the ceasefire announced by the militants on February 20 would be honored at all cost so that peace could prevail in the region and the internally displaced persons return home."

"Darra Militants Announce Ceasefire Till 30th" "The News" (03/20)

"The Darra Adamkhel-based Taliban militants, affiliated with the Baitullah Mehsud-led banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), on Thursday agreed to a ceasefire in Darra Adamkhel, Frontier Region (FR) Kohat, till March 30."

"TNSM Demands 220 Taliban's Release" "The Nation" (03/20)

"Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM) in peace dialogue with the Provincial Government on Thursday handed over a list of 220 Taliban detainees. The detainees are presently imprisoned in various jails and Taliban militants have been demanding for their release."

"Militants Turn To Dir Districts After Swat" "The News" (03/20)

"Militants have shifted their area of activity from Swat - almost reduced to debris by the 20-month militancy - to the twin-districts of Dir, making their intention clear that they would not lay down arms despite provincial government's flexibility to bring peace to the Swat valley."

"Security Forces Arrest 14 Taliban In Swat" "Daily Times" (03/20)

"Security forces arrested 14 Taliban at the Gammon check-post in Khawazakhela tehsil of Swat district on Thursday, official sources told 'Daily Times.'"

"Five Aides Of Baitullah Mehsud Arrested In Lahore" "Daily Times" (03/20)

"Intelligence agencies on Thursday arrested five aides of Baitullah Mehsud and seized detonators and explosive material from their possession. Sources in the agencies said the suspects were identified as Sasta Gul, Sher Ali Gul and Mahar Zad Gul Khan while the other two could not be identified."

"Drones Hover Over Kurram" "The Nation" (03/20)

"U.S. unmanned drones on Thursday hovered over lower and upper Kurram Agency, causing panic among the residents but did not fire any missile during this time, a private TV channel reported."

"U.S. Donates Four Life-Saving Ambulances For Federally Administered Tribal Areas" "Daily Times" (03/20)

"The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Public Health Advisor Mr. William Conn, on Thursday handed over four ambulances to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) Secretariat, Government of Pakistan for Khyber and Kurram Agencies and Frontier Regions Kohat and Peshawar."

"Pak Land Being Used Against Iran, Says Envoy" "The News" (03/20)

"Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Mashallah Shakeri has asked the Government of Pakistan to take action against 'Jandullah Organization' that is involved in negative activities against Iran by using Pakistan's land."

Editorials/Op-eds

"Drone Attacks: Foreign Minister's Stance," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (03/20)

"This is strange that while Foreign Ministry finds U.S. drone attacks detrimental to the war against terrorism, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmud Qureshi says that drone attacks had some utility. According to Qureshi, America has assured review of the drone attack policy in May. The fact of the matter is that our elected rulers chose to remain subservient to America like their predecessor

General Musharraf and thus encouraged America. That is why America now wants to widen the scope of drone attacks to Quetta and other areas in Balochistan."

"Bombing Balochistan," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/20)

"The problem is that the issue of defeating the militants must go beyond the mere aim of bombing them out of existence. We must concede that the drone attacks seen in the tribal areas all through the last year have resulted in the death of at least some militants - possibly some important figures in the movement. But what they have also done is create immense anger and resentment among ordinary people, who have also been among the victims of the bombs and missiles that flatten homes and kill indiscriminately."

"Plan To Extend Drone Attacks To Balochistan," an editorial note in the Karachi-based, pro Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (03/20)

"It seems that the U.S. has decided to implement its plan to launch drone attacks on Balochistan. And now to justify this strategy, the NATO supply convoys are being targeted, as the U.S. is making a case to materialize its plan. If Pakistan does not resist this move at this moment, there is a possibility that the next target will be Karachi, as a propaganda drive has already been unleashed that Taliban leaders are present in Karachi too."

"New Threat Of Strikes," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (03/20)

"American strikes in Pakistan violate the country's sovereignty and give those who are fanning anti-western and anti-Islamabad sentiments even more ammunition. At the same time, the civilian deaths caused by such strikes not only alienate but enrage ordinary tribal people without whose cooperation the war against militancy can never be won. Certain home truths need to be driven home. Pakistan rightly condemns violations of sovereignty but also needs to accept its own shortcomings... Targeting Al Qaeda and the Taliban may be important but it is also critical that America not lose its few friends in this part of the world."

"Danger Of Adventurism," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (03/20)

"If the latest 'New York Times' report foreshadows new US policy, it will mean a dangerous escalation of a very unpopular and controversial policy. It will not only create new strains in Pak-U.S. relations but it will spoil the Pakistan government's efforts to control militancy by signing peace agreements with the Taliban.... If there is the slightest element of truth in the 'New York Times' report, then it is right to say that the U.S. will be repeating another serious blunder and further inflaming the tribal areas of Pakistan."

"Extending Killing Fields," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (03/20)

"The fact is that since the first pilotless plane struck at Damadola, South Waziristan, in early 2006, there have been hundreds of deaths of innocent people but only a smattering of them were militants. Instead of scoring any meaningful gain for Washington, these strikes create more enemies."

"And Now Drones For Balochistan?," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (03/20)

"No one in Pakistan will support the reported plans in Washington to extend American drone attacks from the Tribal Areas to the already disturbed province of Balochistan.... Coping with drones in Balochistan will present Pakistan with another challenge, perhaps more dangerous than the one faced by the collateral damage already being caused in the Tribal Areas."

"Pak Sovereignty To Be Eroded Further," an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (03/20)

"We believe that it is not fair on the part of the Foreign Office or the Government to dismiss the report as mere newspaper speculation. This is because it is track record of the United States to leak such reports through media leaks or statements by Congressmen ahead of practical implementation of the plans.... We would also propose that pro-Taliban elements, if any, in or around Quetta should be given a warning to leave the area and after the deadline action taken for their forcible ejection."

"Drone Attacks And Duty of National Leadership," an editorial in the Lahore-based Urdu daily "Waqt" (circ. 5000) (03/20)

"It is becoming clear that the increasing intensity in drone attacks is aimed at nothing but sabotaging the peace deals with local Taliban... However, the Foreign Minister's statement that he has convinced American officials to review the drone policy has created hope that now the drone attacks would lessen gradually."

"New York Times' Concocted Report," an editorial in the Lahore-based independent Urdu daily "Din" (circ. 5000) (03/20)

"It is an open secret that the U.S. wants pave the way for occupation of Balochistan's ports and resources through drone attacks.... As far as the reports of Mullah Umar's or Al Qaeda leaders' presence in Balochistan go, these are all American concoctions. The basic purpose of such reports by U.S. officials in Afghanistan, or papers like the New York Times is to spread disinformation and to malign Pakistan at the international level."

"U.S. Designs And The Need For Political Stability," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 100,000) (03/20)

"If there is any deficiency on our part in the war on terror, the reason is political instability in the country. The government and the opposition have not been able to establish coordination, hence we have not been able to give the kind of attention needed to stem extremist activities in country. This has not only strengthened the extremists, it has also enhanced American administration's dissatisfaction [at Pakistan's efforts]."

"Threat Of Drone Attack On Balochistan," an editorial in the Karachi-based right-wing pro-Jamaat-e-Islami Urdu daily "Jasarat" (cir. 3,000) (03/20)

"The New York Times' story seems to be a deliberate 'leak' by the U.S. administration to put more pressure on Pakistan. This is the latest U.S. threat to Pakistan that comes at a time when the U.S. is facing hard time in Afghanistan, and we are witnessing peace in Swat."

"Preparations Underway To Make Balochistan A Battleground," an editorial in Hyderabad based liberal Sindhi daily "Ibrat" (Cir. 80,000) (03/20)

"The issue of drone attacks on Balochistan is of global significance, as Afghanistan is bordered with the province, and the Gwadar port is also situated there. And one can see two big powers China and the United States are contending to safeguard their interests in Balochistan. In this scenario, the U.S. drone attacks on Balochistan will certainly make matters worse in this part of the world."

"Kidnapped Canadian," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/20)

"The fact that our agencies have been unable to determine which forces are behind these abductions is appalling, given that we maintain so huge a network of intelligence outfits. The past failures of law enforcers have only emboldened militants who launch ever-more audacious attacks.... We must make an all-out effort to act against groups involved in such kidnappings otherwise we will only see more such abductions in the days ahead."

"Reviewing Afghanistan," an op-ed by Najmuddin A. Shaikh in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (03/20)

"There are sound reasons for being skeptical about the success of the new Afghan policy. But the one element which we should recognize and must cooperate on is the fact that the Afghan Taliban, their protestations notwithstanding, have ties with our own extremists and that their presence on our soil represents as much of a danger to us as it does to the NATO forces in Afghanistan."

"Hillary's Hat-Trick," an op-ed by Anjum Niaz in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (03/19)

"Are women better negotiators? Where Ambassador Holbrooke and COAS General Kayani failed to rope in Zardari, Hillary Clinton succeeded. She played her trump card last.... Nawaz Sharif's breaking through the police pickets to come out and lead the march in Lahore bound for Islamabad was a defining moment. He could have been killed. One heard of sharpshooters sent to Punjab to bump him off. Amidst a sea of thousands, Nawaz Sharif would have gone the way of Benazir Bhutto and embraced martyrdom. His heroic defiance in the face of death drew the fury of Lahore out on the streets. Hillary Clinton too must have held her breath as did millions glued to their TV sets. It was then that she decided to pick up the phone and threaten the President with halting all American aid if he did not restore Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. Only one problem: shouldn't our rulers now ban the word 'sovereignty?' Not only will we be spared its mispronunciation by many; we'll stop pretending we are sovereign. Our masters won't have to make nutty excuses about drone attacks anymore."

Patterson